

A good year to return to college

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Community columnist

1944 – that was a good year, for me at least, that's when I was born.

1965 – that was a good year, for me at least, that's when I graduated from Boston College, a Jesuit university that celebrated its 102nd birthday that year.

1967 – that was a good year, for me at least, that's the year I married my wife Telisa – to whom I am still married 36 years later.

1989 – that was a good year, at least for me, that's when my wife and I moved to Belgium for a four-year business assignment.

2002 – that was a good year – that's when we moved to Nepean.

So what? What's with the history? It's my way of telling you that I'm no longer a spring chicken, I have some years (and a few extra pounds) under my belt.

In the 38 years since college, I have taken many education and training courses, always with my peers, usually business colleagues. This year, 2003, I subjected myself to

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something very different. I went back to college!

Twice a week for 11 weeks I attended classes at Algonquin College. In my day we called it Night School. Today it is called Continuing Education. I think today's title is so much better.

Back in the 1960s, people in night school went there to get their high school diploma or to learn a trade. Today it's everything from accounting to zydeco music. In my case, it was French as a Second Language.

My years in Belgium brought me some basic French language skills. I could order food and drink in cafés, read the newspaper, and carry on basic

conversations. But I left there 10 years ago. Those skills are not very good today.

Now that my wife and I are starting to get settled here in Nepean, I felt it was time to hone up the language skills.

So, what's it like to go back to college? First, there's all these young people. The youngest were kids in their early twenties. I was the oldest one, but there was also a single grandmother (as opposed to a few single mothers). The majority of the class was thirty-somethings that were there to improve their work skills. Many because it was mandatory to take the class.

Some had taken a previous class together. They had three months more personal history and tended to sit together. The rest of us moved around each class until we felt comfortable with the partner on either side. I say partner because we had to do written and oral exercises together.

My regular partner became a young student from Renfrew who was

completing an additional year of specialized training in Events Management. In spite of being older than her father is, we became good friends and interacted well together – at least for six hours a week. Age was a differentiator only for me. Nobody else cared.

My wife and I love to walk; it's our major form of exercise. Algonquin College reminded me that college students walk a lot too. I did in Boston; I did again at the Woodroffe campus. The parking lot is at the far eastern side of the campus. Of course, the classrooms were at the far western side of the campus. Not too bad, an eight-minute walk. Then up four flights of stairs. Should have been doing it every day instead of just twice a week.

When I was in college there were two cafeterias and the Commons for food and drink. At Algonquin, there's a café around almost every corner. A place to stop and play pool and drink beer, too. My how times have changed.

I was very impressed with the ethnic diversity of the students. A mixture of

Continuing Ed students and day students around for extra-curricula activities – but very diverse. In my mind, I was a minority... and not just the age-thing. It was so gratifying to see such a mixed group of young people soaking up the educational environment. Maybe I've just been away too long.

It's all over now. Soon I should get my grade in the mail and see how I did by the numbers. Regardless, it was a successful venture for me – in so many ways. I miss it.

My language skills have definitely improved. I find that I can relate to young people better than I expected. I made new friends. Because of the relationship my company hired someone involved with the engineering program at Algonquin. I have a better appreciation for the cultural and educational opportunities available right in our own backyard. My pride in Nepean has increased.

I was tempted to go back to college because of a catalog included in the daily newspaper. I will do it again, maybe in the fall. For those of you at all interested in improving yourselves – take a good look when you see the

next catalog. You might find that going back to college would bring you more than just book learning.

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